Empty Homes Policy

1 Scope

1.1 This policy outlines Aster's approach to managing our empty homes. An empty home is defined as a property that is currently empty and a tenancy or licence has ended, but a new one has not begun, as well as new, unsold shared ownership properties.

1.2 This policy applies to all rental properties owned or managed by Aster Group.

1.3 This policy aims to minimise the time a home is empty, maximise value for money, meet customer expectations and ensure we meet statutory requirements.

1.4 Empty homes may occur when:
- A tenancy is terminated by the customer.
- A property is abandoned, and Aster has taken steps to end the tenancy.
- An eviction has occurred, and we have taken back possession of the property.
- A licence is ended, and the property is returned to us.
- A property has been decanted, temporarily or permanently.
- A tenant has passed away and there are no succession rights so the tenancy must be bought to an end.
- A new property has been built but not yet purchased or rented.

1.5 This policy is applied in conjunction with our Lettings Policy, which aims to ensure the best use of the property by letting to the most suitable applicant, and the Lettable Standard which sets the specific requirements that our homes must meet before they are ready to let. There may be different standards depending on the type of property, e.g. independent living, general needs, or private rent properties.

2 Policy Statement

2.1 We will ensure we minimise loss of rental income as a result of empty homes.

2.2 We will advise customers of their responsibilities when moving out, as outlined in their agreement, through correspondence and pre-termination visits. This is to ensure properties are returned to Aster in the expected condition for any repair works to be completed whilst the home is empty.

2.3 We will ensure properties meet our Lettable Standard before customers move in, or, as long as there are no health and safety problems, customers can move in, and we will let them know when work will be done on the property.

2.4 We will conduct an inspection after any works are completed so the property can be made available to the customer.

2.5 We will usually only allow customers transferring within Aster's stock to do so when a property inspection has been completed and their current home is in the expected condition. We will take exceptional circumstances into account if a customer is unable to bring their property up to standard.

2.6 If the property is not left empty and in a reasonable condition, we have the right to bring the property up to standard and recharge the outgoing tenant the cost of the works

because of damage or neglect, in line with our Recharge Policy. This would not cover rental loss during the period the home is empty.

2.7   Repair works that are due to reasonable wear and tear will not be rechargeable.

2.8   We will ensure customers who have been allocated the empty home are kept fully informed about the progress of works required and their expected move in date, which may be subject to change.

2.9   When a home becomes empty, we may consider an options appraisal or disposal, which reviews current and future performance of properties before commencing any essential works and looking to re-let. Our Strategic Asset Management Team manages identifying which properties should be flagged as part of our empty home (void) disposal programme.

2.10   We will comply with our insurance requirements if works are required to an empty home, and/or a home is empty for an extended amount of time.

2.11   If a customer is unhappy with how we have dealt with our empty homes, including how a property has been re-let, we will look to resolve the issue in line with our Complaints Policy.

2.12   The Lettings Team and colleagues who have responsibility for empty home management are responsible for the implementation of this policy.

2.13   We are committed to inclusivity and accessibility and will endeavour to provide our communication and policies in accessible formats and in other languages when requested or required.

3   Monitoring and Review

3.1   In reviewing this Empty Homes Policy, we consulted with involved customers who have expressed an interest in giving us their views on customer service policies, as well as colleagues who are involved in the lettings and management of our homes.

3.2   Policy overview sessions will be delivered to relevant teams following implementation of this policy to ensure the content and responsibilities are understood.

3.3   The Customer Experience Panel will seek assurance on the effectiveness of the policy 12 months after implementation.

3.4   This policy will be monitored through colleague one-to-ones and Key Performance Indicators including average days to re-let, refusals & rejections, termination reasons, % of first offers taken, long term void monitoring (over 90 days) and void rent loss. Shared ownership properties that have been void / unreserved over 26 weeks are monitored and reported to the Group Investment Panel each month.

3.5   The policy will be reviewed every 3 years as standard, unless a change in legislation, regulation or business need prompts an earlier review.

3.6   We will monitor customer feedback and lessons learnt from complaints.

4   Related Policies and Procedures

4.1   Lettable Standard
4.2   Lettings Policy
4.3   Tenancy Policy
4.4   Lettings Procedure
4.5   Decant Procedure
4.6   Complaints Policy
4.7   Neighbourhood Management Policy
4.8   Honesty Policy
4.9   Aids & Adaptation Policy

5   Governance

Effective From:	13/10/2022	Expires:	13/10/2025
Policy Owner:	Regional Operations Director		
Policy Author:	Policy & Assurance Officer		
Approved by:	*Customer Overview Group*		
Delegation Matrix Reference:	RO97	Version Number:	V2.0